Unit .02

Session .04

God Renews His Promise

Scripture

Genesis 25:21-26,29-34

21 Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was childless. The Lord was receptive to his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. **22** But the children inside her struggled with each other, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. **23** And the Lord said to her: Two nations are in your womb two peoples will come from you and be separated. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger. **24** When her time came to give birth, there were indeed twins in her womb. **25** The first one came out red-looking, covered with hair like a fur coat, and they named him Esau. **26** After this, his brother came out grasping Esau's heel with his hand. So he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born. …
29 Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field exhausted. **30** He said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, because I'm exhausted." That is why he was also named Edom. **31** Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."
32 "Look," said Esau, "I'm about to die, so what good is a birthright to me?" **33** Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to Jacob and sold his birthright to him. **34** Then Jacob gave bread and lentil stew to Esau; he ate, drank, got up, and went away. So Esau despised his birthright.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God's covenant promises are based on His faithfulness, not ours.

Option 1

People use different methods to make decisions (even some that might seem silly to us): They roll dice, read a fortune cookie, make a pro/con list, phone a friend, or take some kind of online quiz to tell them who they are and what they should do. (Just a tip: These things are *not* the godly way to pursue wisdom.)

- **What do you do when you have a big decision to make?**

The world looks for answers to questions like "Who am I?" and "What should I do?" in places that may seem unusual to us. This is because Christians know God is the only One who gets to tell us who we are or define our worth. And He is the One we should go to when making big decisions. We don't simply go with our gut or make decisions impulsively. Instead, we walk with God as He guides us in making decisions through His Holy Spirit. As we will see through Jacob and Esau, making decisions that go against God's will or making them impulsively can have terrible consequences.

Option 2

- **What things are you waiting for (big or small)?**

Examples may include things like getting a driver's license or going to high school. Maybe some students are planning where to eat their next meal, while others may be thinking about where they want to attend college. The wait is difficult no matter what we're waiting for if the end result is something we really want.

However, trying to reach out for these things before the right time can cause issues. For example, you may have the ability to drive before you turn 16, but if you decided to drive before then and got caught, it could actually delay the process of getting your license even further.

- **List some benefits of waiting on these special privileges.**

In today's story, we'll see how one family's impatience with God's process caused issues even years after they put their own plans into action. Yes, it can be difficult to wait to see and experience all God has planned for us. But we have to trust that God will fulfill His promises and that His promises are always worth the wait.

TEACHING PLAN

God's plan of providing forgiveness of sin would come through a people of promise, a covenant people. God made that covenant with Abram and restated it to his son, Isaac (Gen. 12:1-3). But the next part of Isaac and Rebekah's lives did not turn out as they may have planned.

Read Genesis 25:21-26.

Like Sarah before her, Rebekah was barren. How could God fulfill His promises? It was too much to ask God to overcome the barrenness of yet another woman, right? If Rebekah could not have children, then the line of Abraham would be broken. Isaac was the son of promise, so his son would be the next one in that line.

Activity

Tell students to imagine they are in the desert—no one and nothing else in sight. The day just keeps getting warmer, and they have no water. In other words, there is no hope of survival. Like Rebekah, there wouldn't be much they could do about their circumstances. Ask them to discuss what their first response would be.

Like his father, Isaac was faced with a heartbreaking trial. Yet, unlike his father, Isaac did not take matters into his own hands. Instead, he turned to God in prayer and left the outcome in the Lord's hands.

- **What are some spiritual lessons you have learned from observing others around you?**

The Lord heard Isaac's prayer and Rebekah conceived. But Rebekah's long-desired pregnancy—which surely caused great joy, thankfulness, and celebration—took an unexpected turn. The twins inside of Rebekah began to struggle, apparently causing her such extraordinary pain that she cried out, questioning God. Once again, God heard and responded. In another unexpected twist, God told Rebekah her eldest son would serve the younger—a departure from the normal priority given to the family's firstborn in the ancient world.

- **The ancient world gave privileged rights and status to the firstborn. Why do you think God would challenge this practice?**

Through this God revealed to Rebekah (and to us) that He is unafraid to break our cultural expectations for the purpose of His redemptive plan of salvation. Scripture provides other examples of God doing what was startling and even unacceptable from a human lens. Moses, the leader of Israel and spokesman for God wasn't well spoken. The prophet Hosea was commanded to take an unfaithful wife. Jesus reached out His hand to touch those with leprosy and shared meals with sinners. Time and time again God's promises worked through these obstacles and violations of social norms, rather than work around them.

- **What are other examples in Scripture when God's wisdom seemed to go against the wisdom of the culture?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's covenant promises are based on His faithfulness, not ours.

Genesis 25:21-26

25:21. Abraham had struggled to trust in God's promises because of his wife's barrenness, but God had proven faithful. Then, it was Isaac's turn—another family context that makes the fulfillment of God's promises seem rather unlikely.

Though Scripture seems to pass over the issue of infertility quickly, Rebekah was barren for twenty years after marrying Isaac (Gen. 25:20,26). Twenty years likely filled with heartache, confusion, doubt, and perhaps even anger. Being barren was difficult enough in itself, but God's promises to make a great nation through Abraham, Isaac, and Rebekah surely added sting.

In both Rebekah's barrenness and in selecting the younger over the elder, we glimpse the God's supernatural work to bring redemption to humanity. The Messiah would indeed come through the line of Abraham, but it would not be through the efforts or merits of Abraham, Isaac, or anyone else. After all, these first two patriarchs were powerless to have a single son, let alone form a nation of people or provide salvation for sinners. Sarah's and Rebekah's barrenness giving way to pregnancies reminds us that God was clearly the One fulfilling His promises and working toward salvation for mankind.

We have to be careful not to miss the odd, highly stressful situation into which God placed Isaac and Rebekah. These two people would play a significant role in founding the nation that would bring forth the Messiah, but we have to remember they were still a married couple trying to have and raise children. Isaac and Rebekah experienced all the same concerns, heartbreak, anxiety, and worry that we do today. They surely wanted a normal family—one free of worries, pains, struggles, and bickering. But even if their situation was not exactly "normal," God was still at work to fulfill His redemptive purposes, as He was with Abraham and so many others in Scripture and as He is with us.

99 Essential Doctrines *(p. 80, DDG)*

God is Unchanging

God's being and attributes, along with the ethical commitments He has given, cannot change. This means, among other things, that God is committed to being God and that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God's unchanging nature is good news for Christians, for it guarantees that God does not change His mind or go back on His promises. Christians can find assurance and peace of mind in knowing that the God who brought them out of darkness into His marvelous light is the God who will carry them through into eternity.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Genesis 25:29-34.

As Esau and Jacob grew older, they became very different from each other. Esau became a great hunter, but Jacob was described as a tent-dweller, a quiet man who stayed at home. Though typically renowned for his success in hunting, Esau apparently exhausted himself and had no catch on this day. Jacob took advantage of the situation and became the calculated hunter himself, manipulating Esau's impulsiveness for his own purposes. Esau had such little regard for the things of God that he was willing to give up a most rare and precious gift: the heritage of Abraham and the promises of God.

- **Why do you think Esau was so quick to trade his birthright for something so unimportant?**

One of the most interesting things about the narratives in the Bible is how easy it is for us to immediately judge characters who make decisions that we think are ridiculous and bone-headed. When we read about people like Adam and Eve or the Hebrew people in their wilderness wanderings, we take the moral high ground and pronounce judgment over their foolish decisions. At the same time, it is striking how similar we are to these people and that is often the point that the biblical authors are trying to get at—we make similar foolish decisions.

We are not much different from Esau. We are just as prone to trade God's great blessings for momentary and fleeting gratification, and in doing so, we hinder God's mission. We are also unworthy people who, if left to our own devices, turn from God every chance we get.

- **What spiritual things are you tempted to sacrifice as you go after what you want?**

Jacob took matters into his own hands rather than trusting that God would bring about what He had promised, much like his grandfather, Abraham. Even if Jacob's goal was nobler than his brother's—he wanted to obtain spiritual blessing—the method he used was of a natural man. Esau was feeding his flesh, while Jacob was working in his flesh.

Esau was not worthy of God's promises, but neither was Jacob. Isaac's oldest son had no regard for spiritual things; the younger son used manipulation to wrestle the birthright here (and later the blessing) from his brother. Yet God still worked through this family to bring about the promises He made to Abraham.

- **How have you tried to work for God in your timing and in your ways instead of waiting on God and trusting in Him?**

The God-man, Jesus Christ—the One who shed His own blood for us and was raised from the dead to free us from the curse of sin—will live with His people forever. God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the promise God has fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. If we learn anything about God's character from these biblical accounts, we learn that God keeps His promises, even at the cost of His own life.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God's covenant promises are based on His faithfulness, not ours.

Genesis 25:32-33; 26:1-6

25:32. The author of Hebrews used Esau as the epitome of what not to do in the Christian life: "And make sure that there isn't any immoral or irreverent person like Esau, who sold his birthright in exchange for a single meal" (Heb. 12:16). Esau's mind had been so taken over by his natural desires that he actually rationalized exchanging his birthright for a bowl of lentils as a good trade. We learn here that Esau was not fit to be a conduit of the blessing of God's salvation.

25:33. While the Scriptures do not overtly condemn Jacob's actions here, they don't offer approval either. However, the later trouble between the brothers provided a reminder that God's promises were not to be obtained this way.

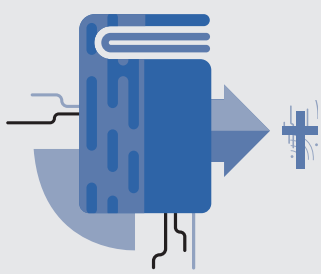
26:1-6. God keeps His promises in unusual ways. As the story progressed, God's people proved to be unworthy of those promises by their behavior. They played favorites, lie, and manipulate. Yet God remained gracious to them.

While God's grace toward sinners is on the clearest and ultimate display in the cross of Jesus, God's grace toward sinners did not begin there. Through the entire Bible, we see God's unmerited love given to unworthy people. We see that clearly, as God reaffirms His covenant with Abraham through his son Isaac.

The promises of land, offspring, and blessing were once again in jeopardy, but God took this opportunity to restate the promises to Isaac. God told Isaac to remain in the land of Gerar as a foreigner, and He promised to be with and bless Isaac. Then He promised to give this land—even the territory of the Gentiles—to Isaac and his offspring. He promised Isaac offspring as numerous as the stars, and He foretold that Isaac's offspring would bless all the nations of the earth.

(p. 82, DDG) Christ Connection

God's covenant promise to bless the world through the line of Abraham and Isaac was fully realized in Jesus. Specifically, Jesus was born into unusual circumstances and died to save unworthy people from our sin.



GOD RENEWS HIS PROMISE

Genesis 25:21–26, 29–34

GOD RENEWS HIS PROMISE

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JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

PATIENCE – Being willing to wait.

HEAD

What is an example of patience and an example of impatience in Genesis 25:21–26, 29–34?

What possible explanations can you think of for why Esau was willing to despise his birthright?

HEART

What are examples today of when people aren't willing to wait? Where do you struggle to be patient?

How is God patient with us?

HANDS

Think of an area of your life that you would rather take into your own hands to fix right away. Write Psalm 27:14 on a notecard and put it somewhere you will see it every day (on your mirror, on a notebook, in your Bible, etc.). Say it out loud when you see it and ask God to help you live this out.

“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart be courageous. Wait for the Lord.” Psalm 27:14